

Additional Resources

Composting Literature Available to the Public

- *Worm Composting*
- *Composter's Resource Guide*
- *Everything You Need to Know About Compost Bins*
- *Compost Troubleshooting*

Information about composting
on-line at:

www.compostsantacruzcounty.org



The Home Composting Program is sponsored by the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors and produced by the Santa Cruz County Department of Public Works Recycling and Solid Waste Services.

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Please pass this brochure on to a friend!

HOME COMPOSTING in Santa Cruz County



Recycle Kitchen & Yard Waste into Gold!

www.compostsantacruzcounty.org

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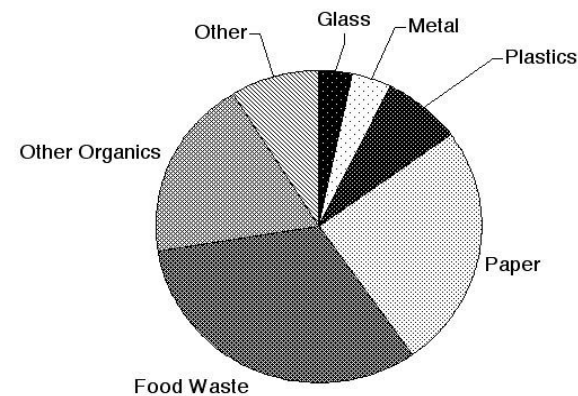
Why Compost ?

Composting is the controlled decomposition of organic materials. It's a rewarding way to recycle your yard and kitchen wastes into a valuable, nutrient- rich, sweet-smelling soil amendment.



Composting

- ❖ **Saves you money** by lowering water and garbage bills and replacing the need for commercial soil amendments and fertilizers.
- ❖ **Benefits your garden and container plants** by improving the fertility and health of your soil. Plants grown in healthy soil are more resistant to pests and diseases. As a mulch, compost conserves water, suppresses weeds, and protects the soil from compaction and erosion.
- ❖ **Saves water** by helping the soil hold moisture, reducing evaporation and water runoff.
- ❖ **Helps the environment** by recycling valuable organic resources and extending the lifetime of our landfills.



1998 Unincorporated Santa Cruz County Residential Waste Survey results.

Compost Works For You

Finished compost is dark and crumbly and looks like a high quality soil. Also known as *humus*, it can be added to soil at any time. Humus improves soil structure and water retention, adds minerals and nutrients needed for plant growth, and provides the soil with beneficial micro-organisms. Compost also attracts earthworms, who improve soil aeration. Healthy, compost-enriched soil grows healthy plants that resist pests, diseases, and drought.

How To Use Compost

Soil Amending

Mix a 4–6 inch layer of finished compost into newly reclaimed or poor soils. Dig 1–3 inches of compost into garden beds at least once a year.



Mulching

is a great way to use compost year-round. In dense plantings, spread compost 1-3 inches thick over soil between plants. For weed management in open plantings, spread compost 4-6 inches thick over soil around plants. Do not pile compost against plant stems or tree trunks.



On House Plants

Sprinkle a thin layer of compost on the top of house plant soil to provide nutrients. You can also make a great potting soil by mixing compost with soil, sand and other ingredients.



The Basics

In a successful pile you will find friendly insects, worms, and micro-organisms that will do most of the composting for you. The following four essential ingredients provide these creatures with the best environment to do their "work."

A healthy compost pile will contain the "big four":

- 1. Browns** are carbon rich, dry, woody materials such as fallen leaves, hay, dried plants and weeds.
- 2. Greens** are nitrogen rich, green, moist materials such as kitchen scraps, young weeds, and fresh grass clippings. Your "green" sources contain nitrogen and will help to heat up your pile. See the list below for more examples.
- 3. Water** your pile until it is moist but not wet, or the consistency of a wrung-out sponge.
- 4. Air**, or oxygen, is added to the pile by turning, or layering with bulky materials to create air spaces between materials. Making sure your pile has air flow will significantly speed up its decomposition.

Do Compost

- Fallen leaves
- Finely chopped, woody prunings
- Pine needles
- Untreated wood sawdust
- Lawn clippings
- Young weeds
- Vegetable & fruit peels and scraps
- Coffee grounds
- Tea bags
- Breads and grains
- Egg shells
- Manures from non-meat eating animals

Don't Compost

- Meat & bones
- Fish
- Dairy products
- Greasy foods
- Plywood sawdust
- Treated wood sawdust
- Diseased plants
- Dog, cat, or bird feces
- Poison oak
- Bermuda grass, ivy & rhizome grasses
- BBQ or coal ashes

The following techniques and tips will help avoid problems and speed up the composting process.

Chop materials if you want them to breakdown more quickly. The more you chop, the faster the decomposition process will be.

Mix, turn or layer brown and green materials to avoid compaction and provide oxygen to the pile. A good rule of thumb for a healthy carbon to nitrogen balance is 50% to 70% green material to 50% to 30% brown materials, per volume.

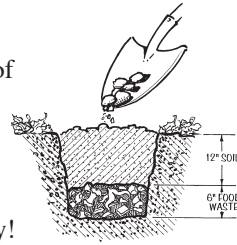
Maintain the air & water balance by keeping compost as moist as a wrung-out sponge. Aerate the pile by turning or creating air shafts. As the pile composts, it will shrink to half its original size or less.

Food wastes should be covered up with dry materials, such as leaves, dirt, or sawdust to avoid attracting rodents and fruit flies. Worm bins are ideal for composting food waste only. See the Worm Composting brochure for details.

Harvesting compost can be done a couple ways: 1) Move your bin structure next to where it lies now. Move uncomposted materials back into bin and harvest finished compost. Sift or pick out any bigger unfinished pieces and put these back into the pile. 2) If your bin has a harvesting door, scoop out the finished compost from the bottom. Sift if desired.

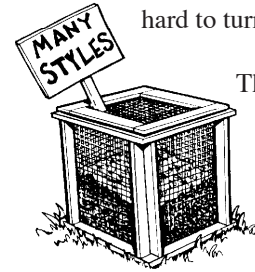
Underground Composting is another form of composting that requires burying kitchen and yard wastes in a 6-inch layer, a foot underground. Allow a season for decomposition then plant, no harvesting necessary!

Remember, the more work you put into your pile the faster you will get finished compost, but don't worry, no matter how little effort you put in, nature will do its work - Compost Happens!



Compost Structures

A composting system can take many different forms and can be purchased or homemade. Most commercial bins have lids and ventilation and many are animal resistant. These bins are good for smaller yards with low material volumes. Many people prefer to have an enclosed bin because it is attractive, however, they can be hard to turn and harvest.



The following lists describe some popular bin styles. Choose a structure that is the right size, style, cost, and effort level for you.

Heaps are the cheapest form of composting and are great if you have a moderate to large area to locate your heap. This system can be problematic if there are animals that may scavenge the pile. An open pile should be covered in the rainy season.

Hoops are inexpensive and can be made out of wire and stakes, or bought as a plastic enclosure. This style is adjustable and can be moved and covered easily, but is not animal resistant. This pile is enclosed and tidier than a heap.

Tumblers and Spinners are self-contained barrels, drums or balls that rotate for easy mixing and fast decomposition. These manufactured bins are a bit more expensive than other systems. They fit in small spaces and are usually animal resistant.

A Multi Bin System is great for a household or community space generating a significant amount of waste. This system is efficient, allowing you to have three working piles at three different stages of decomposition, and it is easy to turn and harvest. This style of bin can be made animal resistant.

Worm Bins are unique because they process food scraps only, and no yard waste. They are ideal for people with a very small or no yard. Call the Rotline to request a Worm Composting brochure.



FREE or Reduced Cost Compost Bins are available to residents of the unincorporated area of Santa Cruz County and Scotts Valley.

Customers of Green Waste Recovery can purchase compost bins at or below wholesale prices. Call Green Waste Recovery, Inc. at 1-800-665-2209. For more details on compost bin subsidy programs for Santa Cruz County residents, visit www.compostsantacruzcounty.org.



Bin Construction Plans are available for several styles of bins on-line.

To locate recycled materials for building your own compost bin, visit Santa Cruz County Freecycle, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SantaCruzCountyFreecycle/>

Compost Troubleshooting

Symptoms	Problems	Solutions
Pile not composting	Too dry	Moisten till slightly damp.
	Too much dry-woody material	Turn, chop and add fresh green materials, or manure.
Pile smells rotten and/or attracts flies	Too wet	Turn, add dry, brown materials.
	Food scraps exposed	Remove meat, grease, etc., and turn. Cover any food scraps with 2 inches of dry material or soil.
Rodents in pile	Food wastes in open bin, holes larger than 1/4 "	Turn compost and rodent-proof your bin.
	Rodent attracting foods present	Remove meat, grease, etc., and turn. Cover any food scraps with 2 inches of dry material or soil.